

# Chief Suspends Two Policemen; Inquiry Starts

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Easton police officers John Harman Jr. and and William Crouse have been suspended, and the investigation of the death of Robert V. Strickland has been turned over to the Northampton County district attorney's office.

In a brief news conference late last night, Easton Police Chief John M. Young read a statement announcing the suspension and asking the district attorney's office to make an independent investigation of the Monday afternoon shooting.

A committee of concerned citizens called today for an "independent inquiry" into the facts and circumstances surrounding the killing. The committee stated its view that such an inquiry should be made by "someone from the state or federal level."

About 200 persons of both races attended a meeting to discuss the situation last night at the Easton Area Neighborhood Center, it was reported

by John M. Robinson, president of the Easton Branch, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

The committee said it is circulating a petition calling for an independent inquiry into the case. The petition also asks for the suspension of officers Harman and Crouse pending the results of the investigation. The petition was prepared before word was received that the suspension had been ordered.

"We want to get the truth of what happened," Robinson said. "We are pursuing it in a non-violent, peaceable manner. It has been difficult but we will continue our effort."

Robinson said in a letter to The Express today that "justice is the only prevailing answer" to the "tragic killing" of Strickland. Robinson called for "honest and immediate action" from the city authorities for an independent inquiry

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into the police slaying "of a young black man merely suspected of a crime."

Writing that citizens question the necessity of the shooting death, he commented:

"We are drastically appalled at the complete and total disregard and disrespect to the black community by the Easton Police Department. We the black people of Easton demand decent and equal treatment under the law."

Strickland, 25, of 204 S. 6th St., Easton, and of an Allentown address, was killed in the Lehigh Valley Railroad yards as he was running from Easton police. Harman and Crouse were pursuing Strickland when he was shot by police guns.

Young and Dist. Atty. Charles Spaziani have said Strickland was considered a prime suspect in some of the series of armed robberies in Easton and Phillipsburg, and was wanted in Lehigh County on several charges.

Young said he requested the suspensions of Harman and Crouse after learning from the officers "that there were discrepancies in the facts related to me."

The suspensions became effective at 10:45 p.m., when they were confirmed by Easton Mayor Fred Ashton Jr., the mayor said last night.

In his statement Young added the Easton Police Department would cooperate with Spaziani's office and that

Spaziani had been informed of the discrepancies in the reports of the shooting.

Spaziani, who with Ashton, Young, Easton Police Capt. Carl Scalzo and City Coordinator Jeff Gilbert was at the news conference, said his office has begun an investigation of the shooting. He said he would call in "outside agencies as necessary and I'm sure I'll ask for assistance from the state police."

The substance of the investigation will be "all the circumstances and facts surrounding the death of Robert Strickland," he said. The length of the investigation will depend on the number of persons called to give information, he added.

Asked whether Crouse and Harman are receiving pay during their suspension, Ashton said "You can't assume they are and you can't assume they aren't."

He explained that the men would not lose pay if they were not charged with any offenses. If they were charged and found guilty, they could lose pay, although not necessarily corresponding to the number of days they had been suspended, said Ashton.

Funeral services for Mr. Strickland will be held at 1 p.m. Saturday in the Second Baptist Church, Easton.

Mr. Strickland was born Aug. 11, 1949 in Phillipsburg. He was last employed by the J. T. Baker Chemical Co., Phillipsburg.

An Army veteran, he served in the Vietnam War.

Surviving are his parents, William and Sarah McNeill Strickland, Easton; his widow, the former Marie Anderson; a son, Robert Jr., and a daughter, Chelsea, all of WilliamSPORT; six brothers, William of Newark, N. J.; John of Scotch Plains, N. J.; Samuel, James and Lawrence, all of Easton, and Anthony of Trenton, and two sisters, Mrs. Shirley McCants, Allentown, and Mrs. Carol Strickland, Easton.

Interment will be in Phillipsburg Cemetery. The Strunk Funeral Home, Easton, has charge of arrangements.